

Dear Chairman Powell and Commissioners,

When I grew up in the 60's and 70's networks looked at news as a public service they provided in exchange for the franchise of the public airwaves. Now it's a revenue center and journalism has suffered dramatically. I wonder how much the evening news would change if there were no advertising to be sold for just 30 minutes per day? Much has been made of the CBS news document debacle but far more could be made of newscast anchors (journalists?) sitting in as pundits on weekend shows. Coverage the debates if it goes true to recent history will focus on expectations and candidate style and steer clear of potentially embarrassing fact checking. That's what we need the most! One liner non-facts echo through the media for days without retraction, or, if retraction comes, it comes after the damage to the candidate is done. In the second item on his 8/25 newscast Hume reported that there was an inconsistency in the Kerry website on how much time Kerry spent in Viet Nam. The simple expediency of looking at the historical record would have established that the Kerry site was including (as the Navy does) his service aboard the USS Gridley in the Viet Nam Theater. This echoed for days, still unretracted.

As a citizen who wants to be informed about the political and electoral issues that affect my life, I am greatly disappointed by the lack of informative television programming.

Local public affairs programming is virtually non-existent--constituting less than one half of 1% of all local programming. More than half of news broadcasts prior to the 2002 elections did not include a single campaign story. Our democracy is at risk when many Americans don't know basic facts about the candidates or the issues, as was the case in the 2000 elections.

Since broadcasters have clearly failed in their obligation to serve the public interest, the FCC should define meaningful public interest requirements that include local civic and electoral affairs programming. At a minimum, broadcasters should air three hours per week of local civic and electoral affairs programming, with at least two hours devoted to substantive election coverage in the six weeks prior to Election Day.

As the elections approach, a well-functioning democracy demands that citizens have access to a diversity of opinions and voices on the choices confronting us.

Sincerely,

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